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Seven iPad alternatives for schools

Posted By [Contributor](#) On July 6, 2012 @ 12:43 pm In [eClassroom News](#), [Featured on eSchool News](#), [Mobile and Handheld Technologies](#), [Technologies](#) | [No Comments](#)



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Besides the new Microsoft and Google devices, here are seven other iPad alternatives to consider—three of which were designed specifically for schools.

With their interactive touch screens, easy portability, and quick boot-up time, tablets are increasingly becoming schools' classroom computers of choice. And while many schools have invested in Apple's revolutionary iPad, which started the whole tablet computing craze, a number of other suitable options have emerged to give school leaders more choices.

Last month, for instance, both Microsoft and Google unveiled new tablet computers. Microsoft [is positioning](#) ^[2] its 10.6-inch tablet, which attaches to a removable rubberized keyboard and runs on its latest operating system, Windows 8, as better than the iPad in terms of productivity. At \$199, Google's [new 7-inch device](#) ^[3], the Nexus 7, is more of a competitor to Amazon's Kindle Fire than the \$499, 9.7-inch iPad—but it will have a front-facing camera and will run on the latest version of Google's Android OS.

With so many options at varying price points and with different educational capabilities, choosing the right tablet can be overwhelming. Besides the new Microsoft and Google devices, here are seven other iPad alternatives to consider—three of which were designed specifically for schools.



^[4] **KUNO 3 from Curriculum Loft provides a strong web filter, easy learning management**

Ed-tech developer Curriculum Loft created its third-generation KUNO tablet with a major school need specifically in mind—digital safety.

"Even with a hard reset of the device, [students] shouldn't be able to break through the [web] filter," said marketing coordinator Alicia Peters. "The filters are in place whether [you're] in school or not. If the student takes it on vacation to Hawaii, [content] is still going to be filtered just like in school."

The KUNO 3, which runs on Android version 4.03 ("Ice Cream Sandwich"), reflects some upgrades from predecessors in its line: The 10.1-inch ruggedized screen is thicker, and the tablet comes with a case that can swivel and stand vertically or horizontally.

The KUNO 3 also is designed to be fully compatible with Curriculum Loft's Explore 1-1 software, a mobile operating interface (MOI). Explore 1-1 allows districts to centrally manage mobile devices through a single administrative interface.

For example, a district could download and sync the Evernote app to all seventh-graders' tablets through a single, centrally automated process. When the students no longer need that app, the district could delete the app from their tablets the same way.

Explore 1-1 "saves the money and time it takes to manage" tablets, said Dottie Coven, chief strategy officer and national sales director at Curriculum Loft distributor Tech Innovation.

Coven said the Explore 1-1 software is especially useful for instructional programs such as special education, which might take place "in multiple classrooms, even multiple buildings."

"The bigger the rollout, the more impact it has," she said.

Schools using the KUNO 3 also can add Curriculum Loft Cloud software, which stores content on a web-based platform and enables a teacher to "push" resources down from her tablet to her students' devices. A separate program, Curriculum Loft Analyze, is an assessment tool that allows students to take quizzes on their tablets and then send the results to their teacher.

In short, the KUNO 3 combines a learning management solution and a mobile device management solution along with the device itself.

"Instead of going to a different vendor for each, we have all the pieces," Coven said.

CDI keeps cost down, caters specifically to schools with new Unobook

CDI Computers Inc. has made its name by becoming North America's largest seller of refurbished computers to schools—but now, the company is staking its claim in the new tablet market with an offering designed especially for schools, the Unobook.

"We understand that the tablet is going to play a big role in education, and we don't have the option for refurbished tablets," said Erez Pikar, chief operating officer for CDI.

Pikar explained that, because there is no significant volume of tablets coming out of corporate leases, there are not enough used tablets to refurbish.

Instead, CDI decided to create a completely new tablet that differs from competitors' offerings in that "it's designed for the classroom environment. It's not a retail device that's been pushed into education—it was designed from the ground up for the classroom," Pikar said.

He added: "We worked with 70 respected educators to design [a tablet] directly for the classroom, hitting the right price, hitting the right type of rugged screen, the right battery life, the right casing."

The Unobook, which runs on Android 4.03, has front and back cameras, an 8-inch LCD screen, and a battery that can be recharged for up to 7,000 hours of use.

CDI has kept the Unobook's price down by designing the product itself and selling direct to schools to cut overhead costs associated with wholesaling, distribution, and retail. Each Unobook sells for \$297 individually, with discounts available based on volume.

In June, CDI sent demo models to interested schools. About 220 school districts have requested to see demos before they place larger orders, Pikar said.

"When you get the education version of the iPad, you're getting the same device you'd get at Best Buy with all the same hardware," said Pikar. "When you buy the UnoBook, what you're getting is a half-price device that is much better fitted for that space."



^[5]Brainchild's Kineo combines hardware and assessment, with customized training also available

It was only a matter of time before Brainchild, which boasts 16 years of experience in creating mobile learning devices for education, stepped into the tablet market as well. The Kineo, [launched in spring 2011](#) ^[6], is a 7-inch, 800MHz tablet with design touches—such as a rugged screen and easily replaceable battery—that reflect Brainchild's efforts to make a tablet specifically for schools.

The latest version, with an updated design that incorporates what the company learned in the last year, features an 8-inch screen and includes an Update Manager for adding or updating software from the web.

On its own, the Kineo runs Android 2.1 and can play Flash and MP4 video. It also includes built-in security features targeted to the needs of elementary schools, such as separate

student and administrator settings and the ability for educators to control students' access to certain apps.

With Brainchild's *Achiever!* software, an online assessment and instruction program, students can learn and practice their math and reading skills either offline or online. Students' offline results can be synched with the server-based *Achiever!* software through a proprietary technology that Brainchild calls GlobalSYNCH, so educators can track their students' progress toward mastery of state standards.

The greatest advantage of buying the Kineo is that Brainchild offers a complete package of hardware, software, and professional development, said CEO Jeff Cameron.

"What's happened in the last year is that everyone said, 'Oh, we want tablets,' so [they] went out and bought them," Cameron said. "But buying is the easy part. With most tablets, it's [left] to you how to use it."

Brainchild molds its unique professional development programs to the product. The professional development courses, which Brainchild tailors to districts' varying needs and available funding, cover issues ranging from configuring Wi-Fi networks to accommodate an influx of tablets, to analyzing and using student performance data.

Brainchild's training sessions help school staff "put it all together" and understand how the technology can be used in the classroom to improve student achievement, said Courtney Dunham, director of customer relations.

A single Kineo device, not including the *Achiever!* app, is priced at \$299. Cost of the *Achiever!* software ranges from \$3 to \$10 per student, depending on volume, and professional development is \$1,950 per day.



[7] Acer tablets reflect industry experience, commitment to education

"This is the year of tablets—now is the time when we're starting to see more and more full-scale adoption," said Richard Black, director of marketing at Acer.

For schools, Acer specializes in providing Android-based tablet solutions, with five options in the Iconia Tab A series—from the 7-inch, 8GB A100 tablet (\$249) to the 10.1-inch, 32GB A700 tablet (\$449). All five tablets feature front- and rear-facing cameras.

Black touted Android-based tablets as a less expensive option for schools, and he noted that the ever-increasing number of educational apps in the Google marketplace now make it possible for students to access resources such as Wikipedia Mobile and universal dictionaries at a single touch.

For Windows-based tablets, the 10.1-inch Iconia Tab W500 combines the portability and ease of use of a multi-touch tablet with the productivity and efficiency of a standard laptop, starting at \$549. It runs on Windows 7 and connects to an optional, dockable keyboard to transform into a complete workstation. In anticipation of Microsoft's Windows 8 operating system, coming this fall, Acer also has increased its Windows-based tablet offerings with the June 4 launch of Iconia W700 and Iconia W510.

Black emphasized that Acer continually improves upon both types of tablets in ways that meet schools' needs: For example, all Acer tablets provide 8 to 13 hours of battery life, which can take students in one-to-one computing programs through a full school day.

In May, Acer launched EduCare, a service package specifically for schools. For \$179, schools can purchase a tablet warranty that covers accidental damage, such as a child dropping the device, and includes two-way shipping for items that need repair.

Acer also hosts [monthly, public webinars](#) ^[8] by school technology staff from across the country. The May webinar discussed how to implement a one-to-one tablet program, and the March session covered the role of tablets in immersive education.

"[We provide] great products, great price points, and commitment to the education market—it's a win-win-win," Black said.

ASUS tablets bridge traditional and mobile computing

ASUS has a strong track record of meeting schools' needs for lightweight, portable devices, and it now seeks to serve schools converting from laptops and netbooks to tablet computers, said Jerry Walker, senior sales manager for commercial and public sector resellers.

ASUS' latest tablet, the Android 4.0-powered Transformer Pad TF300T, offers design features of its predecessors in the Transformer tablet line—this time at a bargain price of \$379 for a 16GB tablet with front and rear cameras.

The new TF300T boasts several key school-friendly traits—from a scratch-resistant pattern on the back of the tablet, to free Polaris Office software.

Consumers looking to combine the advantages of both traditional computers and tablets frequently turn to the optional keyboard docking station accessory designed for the Transformer line, said Phoebe Lin, a senior marketing specialist at ASUS.

Lin said the keyboard docking station, which sells separately for \$149, gives students both typing and touchpad capabilities and allows them to close the tablet like a clamshell notebook.

By itself, the 22-watt tablet battery can last for up to 10 hours of use. Plugging in the tablet to the docking station can increase the tablet's battery life to up to 15 hours.

Walker described the docking stations as "bridg[ing] the gap between notebooks and tablets," because consumers can "use the tablet in a laptop configuration, and then detach the screen and use it on its own."

He suggested charging the tablets via docking stations as a simpler alternative to plugging individual chargers into all the tablets in the classroom. "If every child has a tablet, [you can] rotate kids through the docking stations so each child doesn't need a dock," he explained.

Tablets are key to broader vision of the 'Samsung classroom'

Not content with the success of its Galaxy tablets in classrooms, Samsung has sought to develop a complete line of classroom technologies that meet schools' needs.

"As a company, we try to address [challenges] from a solutions perspective and not ... just a product perspective. So we seek to develop an entire ecosystem, and not just individual products," said Todd Bouman, vice president of marketing at Samsung.

He said Samsung aims to develop a fully interactive classroom centered on tablets. For example, a teacher could send questions or assignments to students through her tablet, and then a TV or digital whiteboard could display work directly off of the students' tablets.

The full solution, currently in the pilot process and set to launch for the 2013 education buying season, would combine hardware, learning management software, and specialized curricula. As for the tablets themselves, Samsung Galaxy tablets—which run on the Android OS—are available in both 7-inch (starting at \$199) and 10.1-inch (starting at \$399) versions.

At New Media Middle School in Ohio, which launched a pilot program with 35 Galaxy 10.1-inch tablets, teachers have found the tablets useful as lightweight, easily portable tools on field trips. Apps such as presentation maker Prezi and survey resource Edmodo have helped teachers make lessons more collaborative and exciting, said Principal Erik Cohen.

Robust Viewsonic lineup offers something for everyone

With a range of tablet options for both Windows and Android, from small tablets for small hands to 10-inch displays, Viewsonic can fulfill any school's needs, the company says.

At \$790, the ViewPad 10 is an ideal teacher's tablet, the company says—the dual operating system supports both Windows and Android, and tablet content links seamlessly to

ViewSonic's PJD7583wi interactive Wi-Fi projector. A more affordable option is the ViewPad 7e, a 7-inch Android tablet priced at \$229, which provides direct access to eReading marketplaces, Rite Touch technology for handwriting and drawing, and front- and back-facing cameras.

"A number of districts are waiting to see" what they will need—Android or Windows devices, said Michael Holstein, vice president of business development and emerging technologies at Viewsonic. "With our current offerings, we've got both."

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[2] is positioning: <http://www.eschoolnews.com/2012/06/19/microsofts-surface-tablet-aims-for-productivity/>

[3] new 7-inch device: <http://www.eschoolnews.com/2012/06/29/google-unveils-199-tablet-challenges-kindle-fire/>

[4] Image: http://www.eschoolnews.com/2012/07/06/seven-ipad-alternatives-for-schools/kuno3_ui/

[5] Image: http://www.eschoolnews.com/2012/07/06/seven-ipad-alternatives-for-schools/kineo8_ipad/

[6] launched in spring 2011: <http://www.eschoolnews.com/2011/02/04/kineo-like-an-ipad-but-made-for-students/>

[7] Image: http://www.eschoolnews.com/2012/07/06/seven-ipad-alternatives-for-schools/iconia_tab_a_2_350x250/

[8] monthly, public webinars:
http://us.acer.com/education/webinar_archives.htm#03_2012

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